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# FACTS vs. THEORY

ADDRESS OF  
HON. HENRY F. GREENE

United States Civil Service Commissioner

AT THE  
ASSEMBLY OF CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONS  
CHICAGO, MAY 7-8, 1908

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## RESULTS vs. THEORY

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**A Paper Read at the Assembly of  
Civil Service Commissions at  
Chicago, Illinois, May 7, 1908**

**By  
HON. HENRY F. GREENE**

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I feel it necessary to make two preliminary remarks about this paper. First, what will be stated will be rather trite and probably familiar to a very large proportion of those present. The only excuse for this is that it is difficult to produce new facts or ideas on the subject of civil service reform, and that some of the things I will say may be in the nature of information to some of those present and be useful to them, and will have, therefore, to be received with patience by the rest.

Second, the subject assigned to me is one which treated fully would undoubtedly exhaust the patience of this conference. Results and theory constitute the whole of any subject and to fully discuss the relationship or alleged antagonism between results and theory would necessitate a full discussion of all the aspects of civil service reform. This, of course, is impossible. Furthermore, there is not and never can be any such antagonism between results and theory as is implied in the title. If the results do not bear out the theory it is not properly speaking a theory at all, but a hypothesis which can never be verified. In this instance there is no antagonism, properly speaking, between the theory of civil service reform and its results.

It will therefore be my object briefly to state in the first place the

theory upon which the various civil service laws have been based, and a few facts which bear out that theory; and secondly the objections made to the reform and a few of the instances in which these objections have been tested and found to be simply hypothetical, and destitute of any actual force.

The first thought occurring to Jenks, Curtis, and the others who initiated the merit system was undoubtedly to increase the efficiency of the service. It was too manifest in the later sixties that the condition of public service in this country was scandalously inefficient, and that governmental work in the United States was done in a manner inferior to that obtaining in other highly enlightened civilized countries. The thought was to obtain a remedy. It was felt that the first remedy necessary was to fill positions with sole regard to the efficiency of the public service.

In addition to this utilitarian conception a moral development in the public mind influenced largely the reform movement. It was felt that if the public service was to be advanced it was impossible to have any other consideration in appointments than the public good. An illustration from the rules of law will perhaps be in point. A man to whom money is entrusted for the purposes of investment is allowed by law to make no profit out of it except his compensation in the shape of commission. The courts well know that to allow in the slightest degree any consideration to enter into the investment except the welfare of the owner of the fund will greatly imperil its safe-



ty—possibly result in its loss. We have excellent authority for the proposition that “no man can serve two masters.” The courts know that the agent who is looking for his own profit cannot adequately safeguard the profit of his clients. So the gradual evolution of ethical standards brought it about that the public conscience realized that the appointing officer ought to have no purpose except the public good. Without question the greatest moral movement that this country has ever seen was that which led to the abolition of slavery. It is a notable fact that the early advocates of civil service reform were persons, like George William Curtis, who had been educated in the school of abolition. These people felt that to allow appointments to be in the slightest degree contributory to the welfare of political parties, except in so far as good appointments would justify the retention in power of a political party, was to allow a breach of trust akin to speculating with the funds of a client.

Good men in the period before the war and since that time have actively participated in the spoils system, but there had been an evolution in the conscience of the most enlightened part of the community which had brought it about that the longer use of public offices for the advancement of private political interests was intolerable.

The gross inefficiency and scandalous mismanagement of institutions like the New York Custom House and the Consular Service forced these ethical conceptions upon the public mind in the early days of the reform movement.

In seeking for a rule of appointment which would extirpate this cancer in the body politic the mind of reformers was turned towards appointment by means of competition. In his address delivered at Saratoga September 8, 1881, Mr. Curtis said:

“Personal influence in appointments can be annulled only by free and open competition. By that bridge we can return to the practice of

Washington and to the intention of the Constitution. That is the shoe of swiftness and the magic sword by which the President can pierce and outrun the protean enemy of sophistry and tradition which prevents him from asserting his power. If you say that success in competitive literary examination does not prove fitness to adjust customs duties or to distribute letters or to appraise linen or to measure molasses, I answer that the reform does not propose that fitness shall be proved by a competitive literary examination. It proposes to annul personal influence and political favoritism by making appointment depend upon proved capacity. To determine this it proposes first to test the comparative general intelligence of all applicants and their special knowledge of the particular official duties required, and then to prove the practical faculty of the most intelligent applicants by actual trial in the performance of the duties before they are appointed. If it be still said that success in such a competition may not prove fitness, it is enough to reply that success in obtaining the favor of some kind of boss, which is the present system, presumptively proves unfitness.”

It is impossible to state more clearly or in more compact form the theory which underlaid the use of competitive examinations so far as they were intended to promote the efficiency of the service.

There was, however, another important object of this reform so far as the matter of administration was concerned, of a thoroughly practical character. It was the desire for the economical administration of the affairs of the Government. Where appointments are made with a sole view to the public welfare no more appointments are made than are necessary to do the public work. The man who is engaged in private business with the sole object of gain does not make two clerks do the work of one, but where appointments are made either from a desire to advance the interests of parties, of fac-



tions, or of leaders, or where they are made from motives of sympathy, the natural impulse is to have as many employees as your appropriation will cover; moreover, where political influence controls and a candidate is pushed it is, of course, possibly to make room for the new man in the old brutal method of simply turning out some former employee, but that is for the ordinary kind hearted man a very disagreeable task, and besides, the man who is turned out has his backers and there is danger of exciting their antagonism by his removal. Much the easier and simpler way is to make a new office. This was the method in vogue under the spoils system in the national government prior to 1883. It is still in vogue wherever that system obtains. Destroying entirely any political or personal interest in an appointment as that interest is destroyed by the establishment of a system of competition it was thought would result in the restriction of appointees to the number required by the needs of the public service.

The third object, and by far the most important sought to be gained by the merit system, was the destruction of the machine and the system of machine government. All of those who have advocated this reform have been thorough believers in democracy and in the possibilities of a democratic government. There are many communities on the globe at present and there have been many in the past where a democratic government is impossible on account of the lack of intelligence or moral character among the masses of the people, but the founders of civil service reform and those who have advocated the cause since its foundation have never been convinced that this was true of the United States.

They have believed that the people of the United States in all of the great crisis of its history have ultimately given a righteous judgment between the contending questions of policy which have been brought before them for decision. They have

firmly believed that it was perfectly possible by the unbiased exercise of the will of the majority to have an economical, moral and efficient government in all of the communities of the country and in the country at large. They have therefore been of the opinion that the activities of office holders in organizing and controlling political movements was an unmixed evil, because public intelligence and virtue were forces which had guided this country right in the past and would, if undisturbed, guide it aright in the future. The object of the civil service law was to secure a body of appointees who did not owe their places to politics and who would keep out of politics except in so far as other citizens go into politics. Since it is absolutely impossible to keep a man who owes his place to political considerations from endeavoring to control political movement, it was believed that if the political consideration in appointment was removed the country would be freed from the pernicious and invariably injurious activities of wire-pullers, office-hunters, and office-holders seeking to retain their places.

How far the theory of civil service reform has been exemplified in practice is the question which is now before us. There are the same difficulties in determining this question that inhere in all political or social questions. The science of government differs in one respect from the natural sciences, for in the latter it is possible to make a satisfactory experiment, while in the former it is not. For instance, you can combine two chemical elements and then you can try the effect upon the two of a third. You know positively that only those two elements are in the combination before the third is introduced, and the changes which follow you know are only such as are caused by the third element. But in governmental matters it is not possible to so gauge the effect of an innovation. Civil service reform has been gradually tried upon the American body politic during the last



twenty-five years, during that time many other things have changed in our government. It is not possible, therefore, to credit all improvements in administration to the reform of the civil service. It is not possible to measure in figures and dollars and cents the effect of the merit system on the administrative system. The Departments at Washington, for instance, have grown largely from causes with which the merit system has no connection. The Departments may have saved hundreds of employees by their removal of politics, but on the other hand they have had to increase their force possibly by hundreds of thousands to meet their increased duties. These economies of the merit system can not be easily estimated.

So also it is with efficiency. Efficiency is a thing which it is particularly difficult to estimate. It is impossible to tell in dollars and cents the increased value of any one clerk or stenographer from his increased attention to business, and so it is impossible to tell in every case, in dollars and cents, the improvement of the governmental service by the competitive system. The only thing that can be done is to observe and reason as to what must have been the effect of the change from the old system of appointments to the present one, and when we see that the effect of that change must have been increased efficiency we may know that the increased efficiency is there. We cannot, for instance, but believe that the Departments are better run now when their heads of Departments have all their time to attend to administrative work than they were in the seventies when the entire time of each head of Department was taken up with appointments. Then any time given to non-political administrative work was snatched furtively from the hearings clamored for by the multitude of Congressmen and their applicants for office.

In one Department of the Government, however, there has been kept a very exact account of the efficiency of employees. This is in the railway

mail department. This large service is one peculiarly easy to fill by examination. Its duties are of a simple character and ability to discharge the duties of a railway mail clerk is easily tested by examination. President Cleveland classified this service just before he left office in 1889, having probably first filled many places therein with Democrats. Mr. Harrison, coming into office, suspended the classification until most of the places were filled with Republicans, and then renewed it. But during the nineteen years which have elapsed since that time there has been a rigid observance of the rules of the merit system so far as appointments to the railway mail service are concerned.

Under the spoils system in 1877, 2,500 pieces of mail in the railway mail service were correctly distributed for every one erroneously distributed. In 1889, the service was still under the spoils system, yet there had been during the twelve years preceding an improvement. In 1889, 3,954 pieces were correctly distributed for each error. This was an increase in the number of correct pieces for each error over 1877 of about 56 per cent. In 1889 the merit system was established. In 1900 the number of pieces correctly distributed for each error was 10,175, an increase in the number of correct pieces to each error in eleven years of 254 per cent. Whether under the spoils system or under the system of competition some improvement is undoubtedly inherent in any service; but the point to which your attention is called here is that while in twelve years of the spoils system the increase in efficiency was only 56 per cent., in eleven years of the merit system the increase was 254 per cent.

Notice the effect of the application by President Harrison to the railway mail service of the spoils system. In 1889, 3,954 pieces were correctly distributed for each error. In the early part of 1889 the service was sacked. The places were distributed on the basis of ability in wire pulling, in place of those evil minded believers



in free trade who had previously held them, among persons who believed in the doctrine of the protective tariff. The result was that in the year 1890, when the offices were all filled by new men, the number of pieces correctly distributed decreased from 3,954 to each error to 2,834, a decrease in round numbers of about 30 per cent, or, in other words, an increase in errors of about thirty per cent. It would be hardly possible to conceive of a more complete demonstration that its theory and its practice correspond that is here given of the effect of the merit system. We have the improvement marked under the merit system. To this the answer was made by the eminent advocate of the spoils system in Philadelphia, the present Mayor of Philadelphia, that such improvement would have taken place anyhow. But to this figure furnish the answer. While there would have been some improvement anyhow, the improvement is about five times as great in the same period of time under the merit system as under the application of the doctrines so dear to Senator Marcy, the late Mr. Grosvenor and Mayor Reyborn that to the victor belong the spoils. Moreover, the "clean sweep" of 1889 effectually paralyzed progress. In 1899 the number of correct pieces of mail for each error was 3,954; in 1890, after the filling of all places under the spoils system, the number of correct pieces for each error was only 2,834, an increase of errors of 28.33 per cent.

The establishment of a practical system of examinations is one of the things which was believed to be possible by the advocates of civil service reform, and one of the things called for by their theory which its opponents claimed would never be done. In the early days of the Commission there was occasionally some ground for the criticism of the spoils-men. The English examinations, which are intended to fill a much higher class of offices than any heretofore appointed by examination in this country, were possibly too much followed. The standard was too high. For a time geography was rated as

one of the essential elements of the ordinary Departmental clerk examination, and I believe history also. It was soon brought forcibly to the attention of the Commission that the duties of a Departmental clerk are really of a simple character and that a simple examination adequately tests them. The present examination, therefore, simply applies to the ability of an applicant to read, write and cypher, the arithmetical knowledge called for being less than ought to be required for admission to a high school. It is a striking fact that the examination given for Departmental clerk is one which ought to be passed by a child who has gone through the eighth grade in any of the larger cities of the country, certainly in Washington, but on the other hand it is taken in almost every case by persons who had from one to four years high school experience and in a large number of cases by men who have gone through college, and that yet only 48 per cent of these who take the examination pass it. Still, however, it cannot be said that we examine people in Greek roots or integral calculus for Departmental positions. The working of the system is undoubtedly to evolve, and it has succeeded in evolving, a simple and practical examination.

The simplicity and practicality of examinations conducted by the Commission has been shown in their flexibility. Many things cannot be tested by a simple literary examination consisting of questions and answers or problems, and there are many grades of examination which are required for the different grades in the service. At opposite ends of the Federal service two very different classes of difficulties have presented themselves to the Commission of which I am a member. In the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Bureau of Corporations there was need of special agents and examiners. The men that were wanted would not be simply clerks, but it was desired to obtain men of wide information, lengthy business experience and a high grade of studies, especially in



sociological questions. Professor Adams of the Interstate Commerce Commission in the beginning obtained from the President permission to appoint a number of special agents and examiners. It was represented to him that the Commission could furnish him with what he wanted, and after a considerable discussion he finally concluded to make a trial of its machinery. The applicant was required to present a thesis on which he was given a grade of 60. He received a grade of 30 for his technical experience and of 10 for his general education, training and experience. The applicants, 401 in number, were divided into ten registers according as their experience or thesis placed them in particular fields of railroad work and knowledge. So satisfactory was the result of this examination that the permission which the Interstate Commerce Commission had received to appoint without examination a large number of eligibles has never been used. The Interstate Commerce Commission preferred to take people which it got from the registers of the Commission.

In 1906 a similar examination was held for the office of the Bureau of Corporations, the grade being 20 for a thesis, 50 for special training and experience, and 30 for general educational training. The circular announcing the examination contained the following:

The evidence of this special training which the competitor will be required to submit will fall into the following classification: (1) His sworn statement showing (a) his specialized and advanced study in economics, politics, and law (this information also forms a part of the basis for rating the first branch, and repetition is unnecessary, as one complete statement will answer for both purposes), and (b) his business or professional experience. (2) The recommendations of persons qualified to judge as to his fitness for any one or more of the several groups of positions described below. The value of these recommendations will necessarily depend upon the extent and nature

of the recommendor's acquaintance with the competitor, which must be stated in the recommendation. (3) Any writings, the result of his original work, which the competitor may have published on economic subjects of any kind (including financial and statistical), or in relation to corporations.

Since the holding of this examination 22 appointments have been made from the register established as its result to the thorough satisfaction of the important bureaus which have called upon it. In fact, in the earlier days of the Bureau of Corporations, its positions were practically filled without examination owing to their difficult character, but after a thorough trial this examination was established at the request of Mr. Garfield.

A similar examination was held with success to fill positions in the Department of Labor of investigators into the employment of child labor.

At the other extremity from the service of special agents of the Bureau of Corporations or of the Interstate Commerce Commission is the Rural Carrier Service. For this service it was impracticable to impose an examination as difficult as that given for Departmental clerk or even that given for messenger or watchman in the Departmental service. The examination for this service, therefore, consists simply in reading a few addresses of not a very difficult character, in adding a column of decimals (dollars and cents), and in answering two or three practical questions about the duties of a rural carrier. As this examination can be passed by an overwhelming majority of the applicants, and as the registers are very small, there being but few applicants to a place, in order to avoid the effect of political influence it was necessary to certify but one eligible for each appointment, and this has been done. That the service thus obtained is satisfactory is shown by the fact that the removals therefrom in a year for cause have been found to be less than one-fourth of those made in the fourth class postmaster service, where the ap-



pointments are based entirely on political considerations.

The second advantage promised by the theory of the merit system is economy in the service. As has already been shown, it is difficult to figure this out in dollars and cents. Two tests, however, may be cited, one applying to the service at large, and one to the force of the Civil Service Commission, the latter occurring under my own observation.

From 1883 to 1896 the service in Washington was divided between competitive and noncompetitive forces, the former appointed by competitive examination and the latter under the spoils system. During that period there was an increase of 37 per cent. in the number and 43 per cent. in the salaries of the unclassified appointees, who were all appointed without examination under the patronage system. During the same period there was a slight decrease in the number of classified positions as well as a slight decrease in the amount of salaries paid for the same.

The period in question was one during which the scope of governmental powers was not enlarged. There was no war and no very great increase in the duties of the Departments by means of legislation. Consequently a great increase in the force was not to be looked for. From 1896 to 1908 an increase in the Departments was to be expected. The Spanish war and the recent large extensions of the functions of government by means of the creation of the Bureau of Corporations, the pure food law, and the enlargement of the powers of the Bureau of Labor and the interstate Commerce Commission have caused a great natural increase in the force of competitive employees.

It will be observed, however, that during the period from 1883 to 1897 there was an increase of 37 per cent. in the number of unclassified employees and as the sole distinction between them and the classified force was the matter of classification. It is fair to reason that there would have been a similar increase in the classi-

fied force had it been exposed to the spoils system. It is also a fair inference to draw that had the spoils system prevailed in Washington during the period from 1896 to the present time there would have been an increase in the entire governmental force of not less than 2 or 3 per cent. than 20 per cent. of the total force. The most moderate estimate that may therefore be claimed for the system of competition is that it saves to-day one-fifth of the total expense of the salaries of employees in the Departments at Washington. Some limitations might be placed on this estimate from the occasional firmness of an official and also from the matter of possibilities because in some cases Departments actually have not the room to stand an indefinite increase of force. In the old days, before the passage of the civil service law, it was not uncommon to find an office so overcrowded that desks were provided in the library and in the private offices of the chiefs to accommodate the employees whose appointment was demanded by the exigencies of politics.

The other illustration of the matter of economy occurred in the Civil Service Commission. A branch of this office is called the Rural Carrier Division, and it has to do solely with the grading of the papers of all candidates for the position of rural carrier. This branch of the office has been taken over from the Post Office Department, being acquired by the Commission in 1905. When the rural carrier force was first established, as is frequently the case with newly established forces, a clause was put in the appropriation bill providing that all appointments therein should be made without regard to the civil service law or rules. In this manner this division, which is now in our office, was originally appointed under the patronage system. This work is now heavier than it was when it was entirely composed of persons appointed under that system, but the work is substantially performed by persons who have been selected through the process of competition. Under the old system the number of persons required to do the



work of this division, which is larger now than it ever was before, was from 34 to 46. At present that same work is done by 14 persons; thus illustrating the comparative efficiency of the employee secured by patronage and the employee secured by examination, and the comparative economy of the two systems.

As an illustration of the lack of economy under the old system we may turn to the famous report of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, made in 1877, wherein it is said:

We began our investigations on the 21st of March, by the oral examination of the officers of the Bureau, but before proceeding far it became apparent that there was a great excess of force employed. Upon reporting this fact to the Secretary we were directed to submit a list of persons whose services could be dispensed with, basing our recommendations solely upon the relative efficiency of the various employees. In the performance of this duty we required the several chiefs of divisions, in our presence and under our instructions, to rate the efficiency of their employees on a scale of 10, having regard to their capacity, industry, moral character and habits. Having ascertained from the statements of the officers of the Bureau the daily amount of work to be done in a given division, and the capacity of an efficient employee therein, we thus determined the number of persons required in such division. Proceeding in this manner we found that the services of 23 persons, with an annual compensation of \$136,000, could be dispensed with without impairing the efficiency of the Bureau or changing the then existing methods of doing business.

Our investigations show that the force of the Bureau has for many years been in excess of the requirements of the work, and that this was the case even when the work was greatest. We are informed and believe that the force employed in some divisions was for a number of years together twice as great as was required for the proper performance of the work, and that in others it was three times as great as necessary. In

one of these divisions a sort of platform had been built underneath the iron roof, about seven feet above the floor, to accommodate the surplus counters. On this shelf, on parts of which a person of ordinary height could not stand erect—deprived of proper ventilation, and exposed in summer to the joint effects of the heated roof above and the fumes of the wetted paper beneath—were placed some thirty or more women for whom room must be found. It now appears that the room was of ample size, without this contrivance, to accommodate all of the persons who had received appointments and really needed; that the surplus force stowed away in the loft was entirely unnecessary; and that some of them, at times, for lack of occupation, whiled away the time in sleep.

We may also, to show that the spoils system is to-day what it was a generation ago, take up the case of the special investigation of House employees, Report of February 28, 1901, wherein it appears that during the 55th Congress the practice prevailed, under a system of appointment by patronage, of systematically paying persons who were absent from employment, even in cases where their duties were such as ought to require their attendance during the year, and subtracting large sums of money from the pay of clerks to give to the pay of other clerks with a view of equalizing the claims of different members of Congress to patronage; a process which necessarily implies a taking of money from the Government without adequate return. See also in the Census of 1900, of which one of its most prominent officials says:

One consequence of the spoils system as applied to the Twelfth Census, was the employment of an unnecessarily large number of clerks. It was far easier, in my own experience, to obtain a score of additional clerks at an annual cost of from \$14,000 to \$24,000 than to secure an expenditure of \$1,000 for supplies which would save the labor of twenty clerks. Under this system clerical labor costs



rose enormously above the necessary or desirable level for there was nowhere an effective and undeviating purpose to eliminate wastes of this sort nor the close scrutiny of the methods proposed to be employed which the execution of such a purpose would involve. Both the appropriating and the appointing powers seemed rather to favor methods which required the maximum number of clerical employees.

Turning to the third question, that of the removal of the civil service from politics and of the consequent abolition of the control of politics by the officeholders or office-seekers machine, the result of the reform in this particular is possibly less apparent and less demonstratable than any of the others. This is largely because it has not been extended as yet to the higher government officials or to the civil services of the different states and cities. It is, however, none the less true that much has been accomplished. For instance, the entire competitive force of the government no longer concerns itself with politics. There may be individual exceptions to this rule, but that they are few in number is indicated by the experience of the Civil Service Commission. Since June, 1907, the Civil Service Commission has had charge of the enforcement of the rule against political activity in the competitive service. During that time there have been to my knowledge not to exceed eight cases serious enough to require investigation, one of which terminated in removal, and others in lesser punishments such as reprimands, while in one case the charges were proven to be without foundation. As the Commission has investigated every case submitted to it it is apparent that there cannot be very much activity on the part of those in the competitive service. This, too, is in the year of a presidential nomination. The President has very wisely held that the rule against political activity cannot be enforced against those not appointed by competition. It is impossible to enforce this rule against persons who owe their appointments to politics, and

who would lose them if they were not active in politics, but so far as the system of competition has been allowed to extend it has achieved its object. The man who is protected from removal for political reasons and who owes his place to standing in an examination does not care to take any part in politics further than to vote. In 1881 a dispute over the position of Collector of Customs of New York resulted in the feud in the Republican party which was prominent among the causes which gave the presidency to the Democratic party four years later. How many in this audience know who is the Collector of Customs at New York at present? How many know that there has been a change in that office in the last six months? Why is this? Simply because the Collector's control over his force in politics has been destroyed.

I think that this city of Chicago is an instance of the truth of the assertion that the enforcement of the civil-service law has produced a high grade of politics and brings into political life a higher grade of people, and without going into an embarrassing personal discussion, I think the same thing is true of the Executive part of the national government. The practice of handling politics from the peanut standpoint of regarding it as a game of traffic in offices and contracts with the ultimate result of pecuniary emolument of the successful is necessarily so revolting to men of intelligence and character that it will force them to keep out unless compelled by necessity. On the other hand the handling of public appointments with but sole regard for the public good will inevitably raise the character of government, and induce many to seek governmental employment whose character will improve the administration.

Thus we see that the theory of civil service reform has shown itself to be in the proper sense of that word a theory and to be justified by its results. The objections made to reform in its incipency have been in like manner shown to be by practical



experience destitute of any correspondence to actual effect. Thus, for instance, it was frequently said that confidential positions, of which there are many thousands, could not be filled by examination; the answer to which is afforded by the spectacle of thousands of Federal officials holding their places through examination and promotion, and discharging the most confidential and responsible duties in the service. In the office of the Civil Service Commission at Washington, for example, of the 170 employees probably 95 per cent. have been procured by examination. There is no Department of the Government whose proceedings would be of more interest to the newspapers if revealed, and yet I do not believe that in the whole history of the Commission any fact has ever gotten out about its transactions except through the Commissioners. A Government official does not need, in most cases, any confidential employee. Government business is a matter of public interest and the confidential employee or private secretary is much more likely to be wanted for purposes of politics than for the doing of the business of the Government. So far as it is necessary to have men who can keep things to themselves and avoid publicity, experience has richly and abundantly demonstrated that they can be gotten by means of examination. It has been repeatedly shown that the man who is appointed by examination and tested by probational appointment is far more reliable, far more honest, and far less likely to be guilty of pecuniary defalcation than the man who has earned his position by services in politics.

It was said that the establishment of a competitive system would deprive us of the inestimable services of political workers, that no one would take any active interest in politics if the services of officials were withdrawn. To this the answer was made and it has been verified by experience, that such activity is only desirable if inspired by zeal for promotion or for the success of a worthy candidate, and that the activity is inspired by the holding or hope of an office might be

dispensed with without injury to the body politic.

The enormous change involved in the withdrawal of 165,000 or 185,000 classified employees has not apparently put an end to campaigns or created any difficulty in carrying them on. The evil predicted has not followed from the retirement of these people from party activity.

A favorite argument of the advocates of the system of patronage in the past was the superiority of a pass over a competitive examination. We are nearly all familiar with the practice which has shown the futility of the system of pass examinations. The difficulty about them is that there is nothing to restrain the natural kindheartedness of the examining officer; the steady pull is in the direction of making the examination easier; the candidates' backers accelerate this tendency and the examination rapidly degenerates into a farce. From March 3, 1897, to March 3, 1898, 112 persons selected by the patronage system on the principle of a division of patronage between the machines of the different States, took the examination in the State Department for consular positions. Of these 112 only one failed to pass. Mr. Root has characterized these examinations by saying that it was regarded as cruelty to animals to turn anyone down that tried to pass it, and that the standard is so low that no one but a congenital idiot could fail to pass.

Thus it appears that in the instance of the merit system "wisdom is justified in her children." The application in practice of the theory laid down by the early civil service reformers and so aptly cited by Curtis has shown that all that was claimed of it was true, and all the objections made against it are baseless.

We can but believe, so long as we believe in the progress of society and of human intelligence, that this movement is destined to spread until it has covered every State and municipal service in the Union, and every position in the service of the Government except those in whose choice the political element is also neces-



sary. We do not contend that higher officials can all be appointed by competitive examination, though many may be, but the principle of appointment for public service as distinguished from for party end, and service so long as the public good is advanced by that service, will, we believe, ultimately prevail in all offices not directly concerned with political questions. Before another generation

has passed away the changing of postmasters or collectors of customs, or district attornies with every change in the party in power will be as antiquated and as absurd to the eyes of the people of this country as are to us at present the barbarities of the old English common law or the atrocities and absurdities of the system of slavery.

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